14497

# A MASONIC ORATION

ON THE DEATH OF

## BROTHER WILLIAM S. BUSH,

### LIEUTENANT OF MARINES,

WHO WAS KILLED ON BOARD THE FRIGATE CONSTITUTION, DURING HER ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BRITISH FRIGATE GUERRIER, ON THE 19th OF AUGUST, 1812,

AS DELIVERED

ON THE 26th OF NOVEMBER FOLLOWING,

BEFORE THE OFFICERS OF THE R. W. GRAND LODGE OF PENNSYLVANIA, THE OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF SEVERAL RESPECTABLE LODGES, AND THE OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF LODGE NO. 51, OF WHICH THE DECEASED WAS A MEMBER.

## BY THE JUNIOR WARDEN OF SAID LODGE.

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# FUNERAL ORATION.

Had I for the subject of my story the veteran warrior of the revolution—whose scar-indented breast bore attestation of his presence with embattled hosts—I should have found, in the variety of circumstance incident upon a course of lustrous events, a sufficiency of narrative to interest the feelings of my brethren. Or, were I endowed with the fascinating powers of an orator, I might presume, by the force of eloquence, to command the attention which I am now compelled to solicit.

Eulogy of the dead, in modern days, has nearly lost its force. Panegyric is blazoned forth to depict ideal virtues, which had been else unknown. Merit is confounded with baseness—honour with disgrace. Praise and encomium are indiscriminately lavished upon the virtuous and the immoral citizen. The laboured and pompous tribute of respect is now no longer viewed as a record of the public regret, but is regarded as the mere ebullition of sorrow, experienced by an honest heart, blind to the frailties and vices of his friend. It is found to be dictated by the warmth of personal attachment, more than by a strict regard for the un-

erring laws of truth; and to represent what the man should have been, rather than what he was. But, my brethren, although by this perverted exercise of posthumous praise, the citizen, whose transcendent excellence had commanded the esteem of all who lived within the sphere of his worth, has sometimes slumbered in the dust, unnoticed, because undistinguished in the heterogeneal mass; yet this has not been the lot of the brave and meritorious youth, whose virtues we are now assembled to commemorate. The name of the gallant Bush has resounded throughout the States, and joined with those of his renowned companions in arms, has added lustre to his country's fame. A national sympathy sweetens the sorrows, and assuages the grief, of the relatives of our departed brother. Testimonials of respect for his memory, have been in various places publicly announced; whilst his amiable and endearing manners, his correct and manly deportment, have been, by numerous circles of his acquaintance, loudly proclaimed to the world.

Accompany me, my brethren, to the cradle of our infant friend—proceed with me thence, o'er the gay and flowery paths of juvenile enjoyments, to the fatal scene of action, where the direful messenger of death arrested the valiant hero's course.

William S. Bush was born on the 27th of July, 1786, at Wilmington, in the state of Delaware. His father, John Bush, who was a native of that state, had resided in Philadelphia at the commencement of the revolution, when he volunteered in the service of his country as a private, but was afterwards promoted to the rank of a captain, in the Pennsylvania line. Towards the conclusion of the war, he

removed to Wilmington, and remaining there but a short time after the birth of his son WILLIAM, he settled with his family upon a farm in Talbot county, on the eastern shore of Maryland. After a residence there of about five years, he lost his affectionate consort, which induced him, soon after, to return, with his infant children, to Wilmington, at which place, however, he did not long continue. He again removed to his farm in Maryland, where he passed the residue of his days, and died in 1806.

The family of Mr. Bush was highly respectable, and furnished more champions than himself, for the cause of freedom. He had three brothers who were engaged in the glorious contest, "that tried men's souls." The eldest of these, major Lewis Bush, fell at the battle of Brandywine; the second, major George Bush, survived the revolution, and died in Wilmington about the year 1794; and the youngest, David Bush, who had been a surgeon of a vessel of war, died at Newcastle in the year 1803. Of the first of these gallant brothers, an interesting anecdote shall be related, as an example of the bold and patriotic spirit which pervaded the breasts of the family. When wounded by a musket ball which he received in his thigh, he mentioned it to one of his officers, who ordered a file of men to assist him off the field of battle. But he refused their aid, telling the officer, that "they could be more serviceable by continuing to fight in defence of their country, than in saving him." On attempting to leave the theatre of action alone, his loss of blood became so excessive, that he paused—and, turning round to face the enemy, died, sword in hand!

The subject of our present memoir, who had, at a very early age, been deprived of the kind endearments and caresses of a fond mother, was instructed under the immediate eye of his father, by a private teacher in his family. His education—owing to the distance of his place of residence from a college, or, perhaps, to the circumscribed limits of his father's means, was not what is termed liberal, having been confined to the study of his native language, and to those branches of knowledge which are usually taught in an English school. His talents, however, were of a respectable order, and enabled him to acquire a fund of information, calculated to give him a dignified rank in the general round of conversation. His manners were soft, modest, and unaffected—his disposition warm, generous, and humane—his attachment to his friends, ardent and sincere. His courage, even from childhood, was of the most determined cast, and claimed kindred to the blood which flowed from his gallant uncle's veins. Averse to quarrels and contentions, he was however, firm in support of his honour and his rights. He knew not how to give, or to take an insult—but, liable to the frailties of human nature, if guilty of error, he was as ready to make reparation, as he was, when due to him, to demand it.

When arrived to the period of life, at which a young man is expected to make choice of a profession, he was placed, by his father, under the care of a merchant, to acquire a knowledge of trade. But this avocation not being congenial to his turn of mind or inclination, he abandoned, after a trial of one or two years, and commenced the laborious employment of a farmer, which he prosecuted with great industry un-

til after the death of his father. At the interesting period of the attack on the Chesapeake, when the spirit of the nation arose in all its majesty, young Bush was appointed a lieutenant in the militia of his state, and when a call for volunteers was made by the president, was of the number of those who tendered their services to the government.

We now behold the aspiring youth enter upon the stage of life. His ambition and his love of country unite, in inviting him to the profession of arms. At that time, it is true, his country was not engaged in war; but, as he held the doctrine of Washington, our immortal brother, that "the best mode of preserving peace, is to be always prepared for war," he was resolved to qualify himself for her defence, and to obey her call, whenever political events should demand his services. As a lieutenant in the corps of marines, an appointment which he obtained in the summer of 1808, he distinguished himself for his mild and courteous manners towards those, whom an All-wise Providence, by placing in the humbler walks of life, had permitted to be subject to his command. It is, brethren, in stations like these, where the relation of superiority must be acknowledged and enforced, that the generous feelings of masonry, are most virtuously displayed. Urbanity of manners to an equal, is indispensable to the comforts of society. Respectful deportment to a superior, is an obligation. Condescension to inferiors is a pleasing duty, which reflects more honour upon the noble souls who practise it, than the possession of endless titles—even should they be "more ancient than the golden fleece or Roman eagle, or more honourable than the star or garter." Nor, did our valued brother in the

exercise of his finer feelings of sensibility, forget the duty he owed his country, or the respect which was due to himself. He was aware, that upon a rigid adherence to the established usages of war, the safety of the nation, and the happiness of his soldiers, depended. He knew that insubordination, or irregularity of conduct, were subversive of the military system, and, that to permit them to exist, would be to destroy the interests of the public service. He was also apprised, that discipline, when properly understood and established, so far from being incompatible with the exercise of humanity, is the only means of effecting that harmony and order, which distinguish an organized army from a tumultuous rout.

In the year 1810, Mr. Bush, who had been promoted from the rank of a second to that of a first lieutenant, finding, from the current of political sentiment, that the prospects of a war were not such as were likely soon to afford opportunities for the display of those heroic qualities, the natural bent of which had inclined him to the profession of a soldier—anticipating also, that without an active service to engage the mind, and occupy the time of an officer, he might be in danger of acquiring habits of indolence, and of living beyond the scanty means afforded him by his pay, he very prudently resolved to abandon his favourite pursuit, until a more inviting opportunity for fame and fortune should be presented. After deliberate reflection, and in accordance with the advice of his friends, he tendered his resignation, which was accepted. But, no sooner had the intelligence reached the ears of his brother officers, than a respectable body, composed as well of those of younger as of senior rank,

waited upon the secretary of the navy, and entreated him to recall his acceptance of lieutenant Bush's resignation. Such a generous and noble-minded conduct on the part of the junior officers, whose advancement on the scale of promotion would be prejudiced by the granting of this request, indicated an exalted esteem for the merits of their gallant fellow soldier. He was accordingly invited to return to the service, with such marks of flattering regard as could not be resisted. He resumed his commission, and abandoned for the time an idea of settling in the western country, which he had previously indulged.

During the summer of the past year, our military friend was stationed upon the recruiting service, at several of the principal inland towns of this state. Whilst in the performance of his public duties, he found leisure for the exercise of those social qualities, with which he was so eminently endowed. His uniformly correct and moral deportment, whilst others, seduced by the allurements of fancied pleasures, were revelling in dissipation and excess, attracted the attention of the most respectable of the inhabitants. His acquaintance was courted—respect for his amiable and gentlemanly demeanor was succeeded by esteem—and a sincere regard for the polished soldier, the sedate youth, and intelligent citizen, excited in the breasts of all, a lively interest in his future prospects and fortunes.

In the autumn of the same year, our friend became again discouraged as to the appearance of active employment. "The speck of war," which had more than once displayed itself upon the political horizon, had nearly vanished. He began a second time to contemplate a retirement from the

public service, and in anticipation of that design, visited the state of Ohio. where he purchased some lands. This apparent change of resolution, my brethren, is not to be regarded as an indication of a vacillating. unsteady mind. It unfolded the principles of an exalted genius—it proclaimed a determination to rise to eminence by signal feats of valour, or, by the exercise of the hardy toils of agriculture, to become useful to his country. But our officer desirous of affording himself the chance of prosecuting his darling pursuit, which might be produced by another session of congress, concluded to await the result of their deliberations.

It was during this interval of interesting suspense, that lieutenant Bush, who had been for upwards of a year stationed chiefly at Philadelphia, was initiated into the mysteries of our order. The advantages to result from an acquaintance with the science of free-masonry, in the course of the expected war, which might place him at the mercy of the enemy, or render him the conqueror of a fallen, prostrate foe, offered to his liberal and benevolent mind, inducements for partaking in the benefits of the institution. At the altar of the temple, in which we are now assembled, was he first taught his masonic duties. By the worshipful master of the lodge which has honoured me with the privilege of addressing you upon this solemn occasion, was he first shown the mystic light.

At length the period arrived, when his country called for the arm of our gallant brother, to assert her rights and avenge her wrongs. The summons was obeyed with all those feelings of virtuous ardour, which so proudly distinguish the patriot soldier. A short time previous to the de-

claration of war, he had been appointed to the frigate Constitution, then lying at Washington, where a short time after he entered upon the duties of his station. That ship, when provided with a crew and ample munitions of war, sailed upon a cruise from the Chesapeake in the month of July. After being at sea a short time, she was chased by a British squadron for sixty-five successive hours, when, by the unparalleled skill and exertions of her officers and crew, she escaped the grasp of the enemy. In this preeminent display of nautical science, so honourable to the brave seamen who accomplished it, and so portentous of their future glory, we are not to look for any essential services on the part of lieutenant Bush. His post in the marine department, which has no agency in the navigation of the ship, deprived him of opportunities for the exercise of his mental energies and talents. To those alone, who achieved the splendid exploit, be all the merit ascribed.

But the Genius of our happy land, during the continuance of this hard struggle for safety, did not rest an idle spectator of the interesting scene—

From realms of light beyond our mortal reach,
She views her war-like sons undaunted brave,
With manly nerve, the toil of sleepless nights,
With steps as fleet as Sol's diurnal course,
She bends her way to Heaven's exalted fane,
Where sat in council, all the host of war.
Her near approach, the crested Pallas hails,
With courteous mein and language bland, she thus
Anticipates the object of her haste.
"Be cheerful daughter," spake the maid divine,

"Two moons shall not their wonted routes perform,
"'Till thy brave sons, whose worth we've now essay'd,
"Behold their batt'ries whelm the humbled foe.
"E'en now for valour's brow is thrice prepared,
"A crown of laurels, of unfading hue;
"The names of Hull, of Morris, and of Bush,
"Are on the records of eternal fame
"Most deeply graved." The joyous news proclaimed,
A heart-felt gladness did at once inspire.
Columbia's guardian with becoming grace,
Expressed her gratitude for this renown,
Intended for her highly favour'd charge.
But when prepared the martial court to leave,
Her mirth was saddened by this stern decree:
"Man, proud, rebellious, must be oft chastised;
"Without the scourge of Adverse fortune's school,
"He would exalt himself above the gods,
"Would dare their power, and their thrones assail.
"This promised glory must be bought with blood:
"But, whose the doom to pay the forfeit price,
"Must be from all, save the dread fates, concealed.
"The cruel sisters, never to divulge
"The solemn secrets of their court, are bound.
"Their victims mark'd, their shafts are quickly aimed,
"And sent, like rays of light, unerring down,
"At times, to force a tyrant from the earth,
"But oft to call a valued friend to Heav'n."
Enough was said, th' etherial vision ceased:
The spangled arch of space immense in view,
Our Guardian Genius leaves the vaulted sky.

The event of the *nineteenth of August*, that ever memorable day, when the skill and valour of our nation was arrayed in hostile combat against the prowess of a brave and powerful foe, affords us all an ample source of exultation. If ever as a people, we had just cause for the excitement of our national pride, it was upon that illustrious occasion. We behold a ship notorious for her insults to our flag, and confessedly one of the stateliest frigates in the British service, engaged in single action with an American frigate. We behold the enemy commence his fire at the moment that his adversary had approached within the reach of his guns, and continue it without intermission as he advanced, with all that confidence of superiority and success, so generally displayed by an ostentatious commander. We perceive on the other hand—an American ship of somewhat superior force—but navigated by a raw and inexperienced crew—without returning a shot in exchange, approach under the galling fire of her assailant—with all that coolness and intrepidity, so characteristic of her dauntless officers. We see the gallant Hull, with veteran firmness and composure, restrain the resolute ardour of his men. We hear, between the roaring peals of British thunder, his cheering voice exclaim—"Not yet—not yet—nor yet—fire!"—The ships are now in close and bloody conflict—the mizenmast of the enemy goes by the board, and renders his ship ungovernable—His prow becomes entangled in our mizen shrouds—and now is the fury of the battle. Our brave marines, with their heroic commander at their head, leading them on to glory, and rushing himself to death—prepare to cover our boarders or repel those of the enemy. But this desperate resort is ren-

dered unnecessary. The main and foremasts of the British ship fall over her side, precipitating into a watery grave, many honest hearts that deserved a better fate. The three flags of the enemy so tauntingly displayed at her topmasts' heads—now humbly float upon the bosom of the ocean—whilst the victorious colours of the Republic, are seen triumphantly waving before the breeze. But, my brethren, to us, as *Masons*, the most interesting scene of this glorious achievement, remains to be told. We behold the enemy's ship in a wrecked and sinking state. We hear the conquerors hail their vanquished foes as friends. We see them extend the hand of benevolence and protection towards the wretched sufferers, and relieve their wants. We see them bind up the wounds of the languishing prisoners, and rescue them from a sepulchre of waves. This is indeed, to administer the *corn* of nourishment, the *oil* of consolation, and the *wine* of refreshment. These are actions, my brethren, "dear to the best feelings of masonry and humanity, and enjoined even by the rigid laws of honour and of war."

But, my brethren, we must not suffer an excess of joy at the prosperity of our country's arms, to obliterate our masonic duties. As citizens, we have much cause of pride—as masons, great occasion for regret. In the noble contest, we have lost a highly valued brother—one whose moral virtues promised, at a future day, to do honour to the principles of our order; and whose heroic powers were calculated to achieve for his country, the most brilliant services. To use the language of the immortal poet,

"I do not think a braver gentleman,

"More active-valiant, or more valiant-young,

"More daring or more bold, is now alive
"To grace this latter age with noble deeds."

When an intimate companion of our departed brother was taking leave of him a few months since, the latter thus expressed himself, with all the fervency of youthful courage: "My dear friend, I scarcely hope to see you again. I expect to be ordered to the Constitution. Should we get into an engagement, I am resolved to distinguish myself, or fall in the attempt. Should an opportunity be afforded for boarding the enemy, I will be the first man upon his deck." Such language as this bespoke the intrepidity of his soul, and proclaimed the firmness of the hero. Similar to the spirit of this also was his address to his men, prior to the action which terminated his illustrious career: "You are this day, my brave fellows, called upon to avenge the injured rights of your country, and I trust your conduct will be such, as to reflect honour upon yourselves, and upon the nation." "His whole conduct during the action," to use the words of one of his associates in danger, "was indicative of daring intrepidity, united with great coolness and presence of mind." It was, whilst in the performance of the exposed and hazardous duty, of arranging his men to protect the boarders of his ship, or repel those of the enemy, and near the conclusion of the battle, that our gallant brother met his untimely fate. A musket ball entered by the left cheek-bone, and passing obliquely through the brain, terminated, at the instant, his short-lived glory. "His spirit ascended amid the roar of cannon and the din of arms, the first herald to the skies of the naval glory of his country"—whilst his lifeless visage, by a placid smile, proclaimed what his speechless tongue could no longer utter—

"Dulce et decorum est, pro patria mori."

Peace be to thy manes, excellent, though ill-fated youth! Thy country mourns in thee, the loss of one of her noblest sons--whilst we, thy brethren of the mystic tie, shed a tear to the memory of thy departed worth! May that "GRAND LODGE above, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," be the seat of thy everlasting abode!